

Myth #50: Taking Things For Granted: Dayton and U.S. President Grant by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

An historic marker prominently displayed on the front of Dayton's Odeon Hall claims Ulysses Simpson Grant, two years after leaving the office of President of the United States in 1877, spoke from the balcony of the prominent downtown building. Writers have repeated the story for years taking for granted the text of the historic marker. The tale in all likelihood is even older than the marker that was first placed on the building by the E. Clampus Vitus, Julia Bulette Chapter, on June 29, 1974.



In fact, U.S. Grant was the first president to visit Nevada, although the two-term chief executive was no longer in office. His traveling party, including his wife and son, reached the Comstock on Monday, October 27, 1879 on the last leg of a world tour. A tremendous crowd in Virginia City greeted the former Civil War general and president, and a gala celebration and reception took up most of the remaining day. The mayor, Governor John H. Kinkead, U.S. Senators John P. Jones and William Sharon, and two of the Bonanza Kings John Mackay and James G. Fair welcomed Grant to Nevada's largest metropolis.

The ex-president spent three days attending functions at Piper's Opera House and the Savage Mansion, making speeches and taking photographs, going down into the mines, and traveling the length of the recently completed Sutro Tunnel from the town of Sutro to Virginia City. On October 29, Grant and his wife boarded the V&T train bound for Reno on their way home to Galena, Illinois. He died on July 23, 1885 in Mount McGregor, New York and his final resting place is in Grant's Tomb overlooking the Hudson River.



The pages of Nevada newspapers were filled with reports on President's Grant's visit to the Silver State. If the parties responsible for the marker on the Odeon Hall had done their homework they would have discovered that Grant never spoke in Dayton. The *Lyon County Times* in its November 1, 1879 issue noted that Grant did not stop in Dayton, "General Grant . . . passed through Silver (City) about half-past 7 o'clock last Wednesday morning, and passed through Dayton half an hour later. He did not stop or pause in either place, but hastened to Sutro The population of the town assembled at the (Sutro) mansion, and General Grant spoke a few words."

The townspeople in the Lyon County seat of government were dismayed. According to the *Times*, if Grant would have stopped in Dayton the residents "would have given him one of those receptions which have made the country famous, which in war times earned it the name of the

banner Republican county of the state As it was the citizens hardly got a glimpse of him as he went through," the newspaper opined, "that they were not given an opportunity to receive him in a style worthy of him will doubtless be, with them, a matter of life-long regret."

The Odeon Hall marker text is another example of a George Washington slept here story, however in this case it is a U.S. Grant spoke here myth. James Loewen in his book *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* tells us marker texts, monuments and other site information throughout the

Myth #50: Taking Things For Granted: Dayton and U.S. President Grant by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

country--he visited all fifty states-- are interspersed with misinformation, omissions and, sometimes, outright lies. One must be careful believing everything one reads, particularly knowing that virtually anyone can mark a site and tell you what happened there. Or so they say!

See "General Grant's Visit to the Comstock," by Phil Earl in *This Was Nevada* (Reno: Nevada Historical Society, 1986), pp. 126-29.

Photo 1: Gen. Grant, center, and party after leaving the Bonanza Mines, Virginia City, Nevada, Oct. 28, 1879. Photo: Nevada State Museum, Daun Bohall Collection

Photo 2: Another error--Governor Nye actually visited Dayton August 9, 1864 to investigate the hanging of James Linn by vigilantes. Contemporary newspaper accounts make no mention of Nye speaking from the balcony of Odeon Hall. Photo: Nevada State Library and Archives

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, March 2000 edition)